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Officials dig into Jeffords project

CASTLETON — Students, faculty and staff of the "small college with a big heart" gathered Monday to honor two "giants of education," Senator James Jeffords, I-Vt., and former senator Robert Stafford.

Jeffords received a standing ovation for his career-long commitment to education at the dedication and groundbreaking ceremony for a series of renovations and additions to the newly named James Jeffords Center for Science and Mathematics — a project for which Jeffords helped secure almost \$2 million in federal funds.

A courtyard scheduled to be beautified as part of the building project between the Jeffords Center and the college's Robert Stafford Academic Center will be named the Senators Courtyard, with marble plaques honoring Jeffords and Stafford.

Castleton President David Wolk said it was appropriate to name the improved science and mathematics building for a man who he said had lectured him often on the importance of those subjects.

"No one in our country has been a better advocate in that area," Wolk said, extending his praise to include key members of Jeffords' staff at the ceremony. "Words are always followed by actions. ... Without their help, this dream would not be coming true."

Wolk said the renovations and additions to the science and math center were an important step in the continuing renaissance of Vermont's oldest college, which Wolk said was determined to remain "the small college with a big heart, where students are known by name and who they are."

"The students deserve an infrastructure on campus that meets their needs before they venture out into the world," he said. "This \$2.5 million (project) is the largest investment in academic equipment and buildings in decades."

The renovation, which will include new science labs and equipment in addition to classrooms, lecture halls and offices "marks a new beginning for the math and science departments," said Dona Turek,

president of the math and science honor society at Castleton who will graduate with a biology degree in May.

"Students will now be able to work with the faculty to perform and produce research," Turek said. "Research experience will allow students to advance their career opportunities or educational advancement."

She added, "On behalf of the students I'd like to take this opportunity to thank everyone who helped make this dream into a reality."

Jeffords said he had been especially honored to receive Wolk's invitation because "needless to say, I don't get many invitations from presidents these days."

"I'm honored and humbled to receive this recognition from Castleton ... and to share space with my good friend and mentor Bob Stafford," Jeffords said. "I'm honored to have played a small part in getting this done."

Gov. James Douglas, who Wolk joked had a better attendance record at the college than some students with his dozen visits in the last year, said he hoped the new center would help prepare students for the future of the state.

"Engineering and environmental technology are areas we can carve out a special niche for our state," Douglas said. "And no-one symbolizes the wedding of the environment and education better than the two gentlemen we're honoring today."